

INTRODUCTION TO TEACHING GENTLE YOGA

BY SHERRY ZAK MORRIS, E-RYT

Introduction	3
Gentle Yoga Adaptive Poses and Modifications	4
Adaptation Overview	4
Finding a Comfortable Seat.....	5
Tight Hips	5
Rounded shoulders	5
Curved Lumbar Spine	5
Varjasana.....	6
Alignment 101	7
Upper Body Alignment.....	7
Neck and Shoulders	7
Arm Position Alternatives	7
Hands on Hips	8
Open-Hearted Cactus.....	8
Railroad tracks.....	8
V for Victory	8
Healthy Reach	8
Uplifting Reach.....	8
Reaches	8
Lower Body Alignment.....	10
Warrior Stance	10
Tree	12
Core Strength	13
Seated Poses	13
Dandasana.....	13
Navasana	14
Kneeling Poses	15
Sunbird	15
The Crunch	15
Standing Poses	15
Hovering Warrior	16
Back Bends	16
Prone Back Bends.....	16
Cobra.....	17
Sphinx.....	17
X's.....	17

Crocodile	18
Prone Back Bends Variations	18
Forward Bends	18
Standing Forward Bends	18
Uttanasana Variation 1 – with Arm Options	19
Uttanasana Variation 2 – with Arm Support	19
Uttanasana Variation 3 – with Prop Support	20
Seated Forward Bend	20
Forward Bend - in a Chair	21
Forward Bend – On the Floor	21
Twists	22
Kneeling Twists	22
Prayer Twist	22
Matador Twist	22
Lunge Twist with a Block	23
Seated Twist	23
Supine Twist	23
Standing Twists	24
Cactus Twist	25
Prayer Twist	25
Deep Standing Twist	25
Gentle Yoga Flows and Sequences	27
Warrior II – Healthy Joint Flow	27
Warrior II – Core Strength Flow	28
Dolphin – Gentle Back Bend Flow	28
Crossover Hip Sequence	29
Lahdeedasana	30

INTRODUCTION

I often wonder how I got to be a Gentle Yoga Teacher. The word gentle connotes traits like soft, easy, slow, smooth, quiet and peaceful. But my innate personality is active, fast, intense and restless. It took decades of high intensity, fast-paced work in the computer industry to bring me to the point where my body was running on empty, but my busy mind wanted to keep on moving.

At the age of 45, I had achieved a successful high tech management career, but my body felt like I was 75. The wise words of my chiropractor continued to ring in my ears. “You have to change your life if you want to reduce the stress that is wreaking havoc on your physical body.” And that I did. I went to my first yoga class at the neighborhood Yoga Vista studio and it was Gentle Yoga taught by a then 79-yr old teacher, Mary Cavanaugh. I found peace and my sanctuary from my busy life.

Over ten years later, I now own that neighborhood Yoga studio and understand why I became a Gentle Yoga teacher. My mission is to bring this kinder, gentler practice of Yoga to people of all ages and stages of life. That is my life’s assignment, my dharma, and I know it.

I still have the high intensity, high energy personality that is innately me. However, I’ve learned to seek balance in a gentler Yoga practice that supports me physically, mentally and spiritually. My hope is to empower Yoga teachers to understand the needs of people wanting and seeking a Yoga practice that is supportive to where they are in life: From stressed-out computer workers, to the person recovering from an injury or health setback, to the wheelchair-bound, the aging baby boomers and the growing population of our honored Senior community. As these populations grow, the need for compassionate, knowledgeable and FUN Yoga teachers is at a premium! Can one Gentle Yoga teacher change the world? Yes, one person at a time!

As is the tradition in Yoga, I would like to honor my teachers for all they have taught me and how they have each inspired me to become the Yoga teacher I am today:

Mary Cavanaugh – Mary was the 79-yr old Yoga teacher I met at my first class. As the saying goes, you meet a person for a reason, a season or a lifetime. Mary and I met for a reason and a season. I spent 3 years with her in a one-on-one mentorship where I saw her teach to people in wheelchairs, senior centers, gyms, corporations, studios, parks, etc. She taught me to always dream, that you are never too old to do what you want to do in life if you have your health.

Justine Shelton – Justine teaches Gentle Yoga Therapy and Yoga for Cancer Recovery at my Yoga studio. The depth of her knowledge and compassion far surpasses any Yoga teacher I have met. She sees everyone from the eyes of a beautiful friend that only wants the best and would do anything to help. She is a healer. I learned from her how to listen, how to nurture and how to encourage students who are seeking help and support, and even how to throw in a few good jokes now and then.

James Knight – James and I share a common vision of teaching the healing powers of self-

empowerment through movement and Yoga. If we could help reduce the need for medication, surgeries and health care services, we know that the world could be a healthier and happier place. Through James, I learned the tools and the mindset to draw inward and explore my body's language (Somatics!), and to listen and honor what I found.

Erhard Rohrmüller - Erhard is a fountain of youth and a fountain of knowledge. I met him when he turned 70 and he continues to amaze me with the agility and flexibility his body still has. He introduced me to multi-dimensional movements that I found were missing in a traditional Yoga practice which I believe is quite linear. His Soma-Kinetics is a blend of Tai Chi, Qi Gong, Yoga, Pilates and Anatomy and you will see his style weaves into mine seamlessly.

Summer Autio – Summer taught at my studio for 3 years while living with Stage 4 Ovarian Cancer. She passed away, but her spirit is as vibrant as ever. Wow! What did she teach me? Well for one, that you can teach an entire Yoga class without demonstrating one pose. And that you can play “other” kinds of music besides Yoga music. But most importantly, she taught me how to live in the present moment of fun, laughter, movement, celebration and community!

May you be an inspiration to your students and to the world!

Love and Blessings on your Yoga Journey!

Sherry Zak Morris, E-RYT

GENTLE YOGA ADAPTIVE POSES AND MODIFICATIONS

A Gentle Yoga class usually includes a mix of people of varying ages, abilities, energy levels and Yoga experience. Therefore, teaching a Gentle Yoga class requires certain skills and knowledge in order to create a safe, effective and enjoyable class. In the many Yoga classes I have taught, I see a common set of alignment issues, injuries and/or physical limitations that require adaptations of some of the traditional Yoga poses and sequences. This section will address the following:

- Identify common issues in the Gentle Yoga population and the need for an adaptation.
- Describe the adjustment and/or modification to better support the pose.
- Guide you through the movement so you can have your own experience.

Most of the poses and sequences we will cover in this Training Program are common across a typical Yoga class. No matter if you are teaching a group Gentle Yoga class, a Chair Yoga class or an Adaptive Yoga class to Seniors and/or the wheelchair-bound, you will learn the basic fundamentals of what defines the word “gentle” in Gentle Yoga.

ADAPTATION OVERVIEW

The rest of this Chapter will focus on the key areas where I have found the need to modify poses for the Gentle Yoga student. I have grouped these modifications and adaptations by anatomical area so that they are easy to reference and correlate to how you might incorporate them into a typical Gentle Yoga class.

Some of these modifications will be explored in-depth through this Program, some will be woven into the Live Yoga classes available through video, and some will be broken down in the Anatomy and/or Deep Dive Modules.

All of these poses, modifications and adaptations were created based on what I see teaching my Gentle Yoga classes. Have a watchful eye on your students as we learn the most from them!

Finding a Comfortable Seat

The first few minutes of class is an important time for the student to become present. A comfortable seat is a posture that feels supportive and easy. As with the many different shapes and sizes of people, the starting posture comes in many variations.



Tight Hips

If the hips are higher than the knees when sitting cross-legged, this points to the fact that the external rotation of the hips is limited. The student can hold this pose if they have strong core muscles, but they will eventually tire and their lower back will collapse.

Rounded shoulders

This posture looks comfortable, but lacks structure and strength. The thoracic area is slumped forward, limiting breathing which is critical to the centering process.

Curved Lumbar Spine

The backward curve of the low back increases the pressure on the lower vertebrae and causes misalignment throughout the spine.



The use of a seat cushion will help elevate the hips to the same height as the knees, and the back will align straight. Make sure the sit bones are touching the prop and are slightly tilted forward.

An option to use a folded blanket provides an easy way to adjust to the height needed.

A simple tilt forward of the pelvis will bring back the lumbar spine support.

Varjasana



This option could be an option if there is no knee contraindications. Notice the tall spine, and the supporting curves along the back.

Using a cushion or blanket between the hips and legs opens up the back of the knees to reduce knee pressure.

This option encourages the opening of the hips, which is needed.

Alignment 101

Much of the trouble and injuries we can get our bodies into can be due to misalignment in some shape or form. If we move in a misaligned position, we can injure ourselves. If we hold a misaligned position, we are etching in bad posture. In this section, I will cover the key areas of misalignment that I see in my Gentle Yoga classes.

Upper Body Alignment

For students with upper body injuries, or who have tight neck and shoulders, many of the upper body movements can aggravate or even cause pain if not done correctly or are not supported appropriately. Because of my chronic neck and shoulder issues in my past, I am very sensitive to this area of the body and often offer up many variations for students to explore for their comfort.

Neck and Shoulders

So many Yoga poses have the option to extend the arms upwards, so proper alignment is important in meeting each student's needs. In the 50+ population, I see lots of neck tension and often many shoulder injuries and movement restrictions. Let's be kind to our students' neck and shoulders!



Comfort vs. Perfection



Many students feel if they exaggerate and really reach, the benefit is greater. This aggravates tight neck muscles even more.



The incredible lightness and shoulder freedom comes with the widening of the arms and the dropping of the shoulders away from the ears.

Arm Position Alternatives

Have your students try several of these options throughout the course of the class. Certain days, certain movements feel better than others. If you are demonstrating the pose, make sure to not always demonstrate the most challenging one!



Hands on Hips



Open-Hearted Cactus



Railroad tracks



V for Victory



Healthy Reach



Uplifting Reach

Reaches

As with upward reaches, when the arms are lifted to the sides in poses like Warrior II, there is a similar tendency to elevate the shoulders which compromises the alignment and integrity of the overall pose.



Scrunching of the shoulders is common. To drop the shoulder blades down the back and release neck tension, have the student turn the palms up which will retract the shoulder blades. Then flip the palms back down keeping the shoulder blades engaged.

These simple arm variations ease tension in the shoulders allowing the student to stay comfortable in the pose, especially in a hold.





This is a very common alignment which I feel demonstrates the need to move forward or over-extend in effort. Often times this comes with the knee far extending the ankle.

Be on the look-out for this one! Encourage them to be in the middle, in the present moment.

Not as common of an alignment, but this one often occurs with the back hand dropping down toward the floor as if the person were being pulled back.

Encourage the centering of the torso by gently touching the front hand and bringing it forward.

Lower Body Alignment

In standing poses, especially those that are being held for a period of time, alignment is critical. If a pose is held for 4 to 5 breaths in a misaligned stance, the student will achieve minimal benefit and could possibly sustain an injury.

Warrior Stance

Oh my! What most of us learned in our Yoga Teacher Training about Warrior alignment is not practical when we are working with students with low back and knee joint issues.

Warrior I

Place the legs parallel as if they are on railroad tracks. Heel to instep alignment is very challenging for most students, especially those with tight hips.



To ensure the proper squared-hip alignment in Warrior I, start the pose with the hands on the hips to bring awareness to the aligned pelvis.

Over-extending the knee beyond the ankle is common. To bring that awareness to the student, have them adjust their stance until they can see their toes.

In an ideal world, this is the standard knee over ankle alignment for Warrior I. However this is a deep knee bend and if held for length, can cause too much stress on the joint.

A slight bend in the knee will provide the strength and stability in the pose that is needed. Make sure the knee cap is straight over the 2nd and 3rd toes.

Warrior II

Leg distance and hip angles can vary widely depending on the anatomy of each individual student. Being mindful of our cueing will keep our students safe and supported in their unique body structures.



Justine has the ability to external rotate her hips so that she can "square her hips" forward. A person who can do full lotus will most likely be able to create this stance.



Here is an 80-something student who has a short stride in her Warrior II stance. This can be because her balance feels more confident with a shorter stance, or her hip flexors are tight.



This photo shows that no matter what age we are, our bodies have certain anatomical limitations. 80-something Lucy has a long stride and more squared hips. That is me in the back, tight hips with limited external rotation.

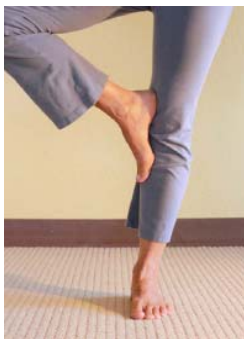
Tree

Tree pose is one of the best balancing poses we can offer in a Gentle Yoga class, but foot placement is key. Tree pose is about balance, strength, stability and creating that stillness in the moment. The position of the feet should be supportive so that the body does not fight the balancing by over-swaying. There should be a steady, grounded feeling to the pose. If balance is an issue, the chair or a wall can be used for support.



The Kickstand - Positioning the lifted foot into the instep of the balancing foot gives a solid foundation to the pose. The student receives the same balance and strengthening benefits in this "gentler" version of Tree.

Every day our balance and energy level is different. In Tree, we can help our students explore how they are feeling at the present moment. Experiment with feet and arm placement until the pose feels strong, yet serene.



This is a common misalignment position in Tree. It offers a feeling of security because the instep of the lifted foot snuggles in so nicely into the side of the knee.

However, the inward pressure on the inner knee can create stress on the outer knee joint.



Arch to Calf - This placement creates a sturdy foundation for Tree. The arch of the foot fits so nicely into the muscle of the calf.

Core Strength

We might not be so concerned about six-pack abs these days as much as we are interested in having a strong and stable low back and upright posture. Thus why building core strength is important in our Gentle Yoga Classes. Just sitting upright, with the spine erect actually takes a lot of core strength. When the core muscles are not strong enough to hold the spine erect, "release valves" come into play. Release valves are default movement patterns that a body moves into to find comfort. Let's look at a few.

Seated Poses

Many seated poses require the spine to be tall and erect. But if the core muscles are weak, the back muscles will overcompensate and eventually cause strain or injury. It is important to strengthen the muscles of the core and the back as they are the girdle which supports a healthy posture and easy-to-find alignment.

Dandasana

This pose seems like it would be so easy, but it is quite challenging to hold for a period of time. Tight hamstrings, weak core and back muscles can make this pose one of the least favorites, along with Navasana! I always hear groans when we do these poses.



Here we can see the spine is erect and the shoulders are aligned with the hips.



This would be a common release value - hunching of the shoulders.



Another release value - the bucket seat. In this photo, Justine is rolled back on her sit bones and her pelvis is tucked under creating stress on your lower vertebral discs.

I often do the "Dandasana Test" so that the student can feel the proper alignment of the pose. Have the student sit up tall with their legs straight out in front of them, feet gently flexed. Make sure the shoulders are rolled back and down and the hands are placed to each side, palms down, fingers facing forward. Now, gently lift the palms and/or the hands off the floor (perhaps on the lap or even in prayer position) and see if the same "L-shaped" position can be maintained. If the spine collapses, more core strength is needed.

Variations for Dandasana



Place a wedge under the sit bones which helps to tilt the pelvis slightly forward for those who tend to sit in the bucket seat!



For more ease, bend one knee so that the spine feels comfortable sitting erect.



Here is a way to practice Dandasana in a chair!

Navasana

What is Navasana doing in a Gentle Yoga class? Building core strength! The full Navasana pose, where the legs are straight and the arms are reaching, is challenging for most people. However, it is a very good core and back strengthening pose. With a few modifications, this pose can be accessible and actually enjoyed.



One of the most common ways a student will compensate in the pose is to round the back, scrunch the shoulders and tilt the pelvis back into the bucket seat in order to stay upright.

If you see this happening, have them try one of the modifications above.



Kneeling Poses

Because the core and back are so inter-dependent, any pose that works these two areas as a stable unit can benefit core strength. For students with knee sensitivity, you might offer this pose lying on the back.



Sunbird - This balancing pose is a great core strengthener. Create a flow, by alternating sides with every breath cycle.

The Crunch – To strengthen the external obliques, a key part of a healthy torso and back, add a diagonal crunch to this flow.

Standing Poses

Any standing pose that requires the body to stay in an off-balanced position will use and strengthen the muscles of the core and back. Try these core-strengthening variations as an alternative to sitting or kneeling poses.

Hovering Warrior

What a fun pose. This is easy to move into from a Warrior I position. It is great for balance and when held, works the core and back muscles and those strong knees and thighs too! Sometimes I even see a student lift off the back leg and fly!



Notice how the back remains flat and long with a slight bend at the hips.



In this version, the torso remains in a same line as the back thigh, giving it a diagonal rather than a horizontal shape.

Back Bends

If there is one movement that we don't get enough of in our everyday lives it is backbending! Backbending counteracts all the sitting we do and opens up the front of the body, especially weak and tight hip flexors. But, students with low back issues such as stenosis or lumbar disc issues - backbends can be contraindicated. Here are a few gentler versions of Yoga backbends.

Prone Back Bends

You will find that many people who come to a Gentle Yoga class have back issues or back pain. Make sure to always speak to a new student about their condition so that you are aware of their issues and limitations. One of the key questions I ask a student who has a back complaint is "What type of back movement feels better to you? A forward bending movement or a back bending movement?" They will most likely know immediately which one does not feel comfortable. That means they should avoid that type of movement until they feel capable of doing it without discomfort.

Cobra

Cobra is one of the gentlest backbends if done in moderation. I find that most students feel they should come up high and lift the chest way off the ground. To keep it safe and effective, have them keep the palms down or lift the hands about two inches off the floor. Then lift the legs if desired.

**Sphinx**

Sphinx is a more challenging back bend as it lifts the upper body substantially higher, thereby causing more of an arch and compression on the lumbar spine. If this pose is comfortable and accessible to the student, add a gentle twist by flexing one foot and looking over the other shoulder. The hip flexor and quad stretch is an added benefit to this variation.

**X's**

Oftentimes called the "Superman" pose because one feels like flying! This is a great alternative to Dhanurasana (bow pose) with the added benefit of lengthening and tractioning the spine while supporting a healthy low back arch.



Crocodile

This pose is great to do in between back bends to release the back and hips, and open the pelvis. Stack the forearms on top of each other and let the forehead rest. Encourage your students to let go of all muscular effort and relax.



Notice how the toes are turned out and the heels are turned in. This is a relaxing and comfortable hip opener for people with tight hips like myself. But some students prefer to have their feet parallel or even slightly inverted (rotated inward).

Offer up all 3 options and let the student decide which one supports them the best.

Prone Back Bends Variations

Backbends are never boring with Justine around. Here are some interesting movement patterns to add to your backbend series.



Arms in cactus pose will help strengthen the rhomboids.



Alternating lifting the opposite arm and leg is great for scoliosis.



Bending and saluting the arm while alternating the leg adds in the mind/body coordination challenge.

Forward Bends

If there is one movement that makes me cringe when I watch, it is a forward bend. For students with tight low back muscles and/or tight hamstrings, forward bending can be quite challenging, and sometimes dangerous.

Standing Forward Bends

When forward bends are done incorrectly, the risk of damage to the lumbar discs is increased. The hinging movement of the bend should be done at the hips, but often times the hamstrings are too tight and thus restricts this optimal movement. Over-compensation for these tight hamstrings rounds the entire back and pulls on the low back even further.

If your student's forward bend looks like the one on the right, throw them a life preserver and find a variation that will support them and keep them safe.

Caution: Remove the phrase "Roll up like a Rag Doll" from your Gentle Yoga vocabulary. The angle of the spine is quite precarious as it pulls against gravity to a standing position. Rather, bend the knees and squeeze the shoulder blades when coming up out of a forward bend.



Uttanasana Variation 1 – with Arm Options



This forward bend is the beginning movement of a Sun Salutation. Notice how the legs are straight, the back is flat and the arms are extended off to the side as the bend occurs.

There is a moment during this forward bend when the back cannot remain stable and flat any longer, and a gentle bend to the knees will make the bend more accessible as it takes the movement to the floor.



If a full forward bend to the floor is not accessible to the student, then work on the mechanics of the bend starting in Cactus position. With a tilt of the hips, and the knees bent, move a quarter of the way down and hold.

To bring more stability to the bend, place the hands on the hips, back flat, and the knees bent. To hold the forward bend more deeply and comfortably, grab the elbows with the opposite hand and keep the knees generously bent.

Uttanasana Variation 2 – with Arm Support

In this variation, the hands are placed behind the thighs creating a natural opening to the chest and a forward tilt to the pelvis which supports a healthy fold. The student becomes more aware of the bending motion as the hands slide down and they can stop at a point of comfort and support.



Uttanasana Variation 3 – with Prop Support

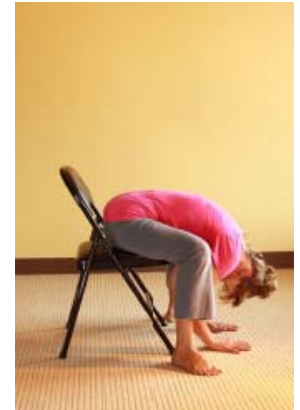
There is something about wanting to touch the floor in a standing forward bend that brings out the competitive nature. Here the student can benefit from this feeling of getting to the destination with the use of a chair or block. The knees can be bent or straight during the fold and the hold to encourage a strong, flat spine.



Seated Forward Bend

Seated forward bends may seem like they are easier to do because tight hamstrings are not the limiting factor. But in fact, the same issue applies in all forward bends – the pelvis must be tilted downward to keep the low back flat and supported.

Forward Bend - in a Chair



If the forward bend starts in this position, the spine is taking the brunt of the movement.

Starting a bend in a straddled position can help make this pose more accessible. Always encourage less bend than more bend, until the pose feels effortless and releasing.

Notice how the back remains flat even in the deepest part of the bend.



Note the forward tilt of the pelvis. Using the hands as a guide can help the student feel the shift forward. Reaching the arms and holding the pose will help to create strength in the low back and core.

Forward Bend – On the Floor



The use of props can provide alignment support and comfort. Always ensure the pelvis is tilted forward and the back is long before a complete forward fold.

Twists

Twists are important to keep the spine healthy and the organs massaged and stimulated, but some of the more binding twist options can be contradictory for those with spinal issues. Here are a few "gentle" twisting options.

Kneeling Twists

Kneeling twists offer both the benefits of twists along with core strength and balance. I notice when I offer these adaptations, some students find it hard to balance, so you can encourage them to twist just to where it feels they have comfort and control.

Prayer Twist

This is a nice variation to add into your lunge sequences.



Begin by stepping one foot forward to establish a solid lunge position.

Place the hands in prayer.

On the exhale, place the elbow to the opposite knee. The gaze can be straight ahead, or slightly upward.

To increase the lateral extension on the side with the raised elbow, lift the elbow a bit higher.

Matador Twist

This sequence is a bit more challenging as it takes more core strength to hold the pose with the twist.



Notice the deeper lunge stance. Place one palm on the small of the back and extend the other arm straight in front.

Begin to challenge the balance by turning the head and gaze.

Extend the back arm straight behind. If this causes shoulder discomfort, keep the hand on the hip.

The most challenging option is looking at the back hand. Come back to kneeling and repeat on the other side.

Lunge Twist with a Block

Never be shy about offering up a prop to better support your student in a pose. Many times, students will have their block and belt handy just in case they need it. A block is their helper, not their crutch!



Seated Twist

I find that a seated twist is more challenging than other variations simply because it requires the spine to be tall and erect before engaging in the twisting movement. In this seated twist version, we are using a wedge to help tilt the pelvis forward.



Supine Twist

Twists in a supine position allow more flexibility and range of motion for the entire spine to twist. Here are two options using props.



Keeping the hips and knees parallel and aligned is one of the safest ways we can practice a twist. Especially for students with SI Joint issues, using a block will ensure both sides of the SI Joint remain stable.



If the knees cannot release completely to the floor, more tension is created in the low back. Thus, using a bolster to support the twist allows the student to hold this pose for added benefit.

Standing Twists

In standing twists, the pelvis is not in a fixed position as in a seated twist, so it offers more range of motion for the entire spine. Using the breath during the twisting process is important to keeping the twist safe and the core engaged. Cue your students to "exhale on the twist while drawing the belly slightly inward" toward the spine.

Cactus Twist

This is a basic twist which is quite accessible to most students. If there is shoulder pain, lower the cactus arms.



Prayer Twist

This is a more challenging twist as it requires balance and core strength along with the twisting movement.



Deep Standing Twist

This move I often incorporate into my half Sun Salutation flow which gives the students a twist with a challenge.



If a forward bend to the floor is accessible to the student, the twist can get deeper and more challenging.



GENTLE YOGA FLOWS AND SEQUENCES

I teach a blend of static Yoga poses as well as flowing sequences. We might view those flowing sequences as a type of "vinyasa", but for many... vinyasa is perceived as active, challenging and heated. These flows are simple combinations of movements linked to breath. Sprinkle some into your teaching! And create your own!

Warrior II – Healthy Joint Flow

Every time we bend and straighten our knee, we are encouraging healthy joint tracking and strengthening of the quadricep muscles. Start with good and supportive Warrior II alignment and add this flow with the breath.



Notice that my stance is quite narrow for a "traditional" Warrior II stance. Keep it safe and comfortable. We are actually doing some balancing work in this sequence.

On the inhale, raise both arms up and touch them in prayer position.

On the exhale, lower the arms back to shoulder height. Continue this flow several rounds.

You can even add an option to look up at the hands to stretch the neck and challenge the balance.

Warrior II – Core Strength Flow

This flowing sequence is great for challenging the balance while activating and strengthening the core muscles. The core muscles are responsible for stabilizing our spine and torso which we can see is needed in this moving sequence. Feel free to move with the breath, one movement one breath - or hold the pose for a breath or two longer before moving into the next flow.



Begin in Warrior II position.



On the inhale, drop the back hand down the back thigh and raise the front arm upward, palm facing in.



On the exhale, return back to Warrior II.



On the inhale, move into side angle. Use the gentler option by placing the elbow on the knee for support. Gaze is upward or straight ahead if balance is more precarious

Dolphin – Gentle Back Bend Flow

This flow can be used as an alternative to Chakravakasana or even a Chaturanga Flow in a Sun Salutation. It has the dual benefit of a backbend and forward bend, along with arm strengthening. Every movement comes with a breath cycle.



Start in a kneeling position.



Walk the hands forward about 3-4 inches.



On the inhale, bring the body forward with the shoulders lined up over the wrists. Remember to keep the shoulder blades down and stable



On the exhale, slowly lower the body, placing the thighs, hips, belly and then chest down. Remember to engage the core muscles as you lower to stabilize the lower back.

Inhale and lift up to low cobra.



Exhale and begin to push back to the knees and move into modified child's pose with legs parallel. Repeat the cycle several times. You can even incorporate some alternative prone back bends besides Cobra (cactus arms, X's).

Crossover Hip Sequence

I do this sequence in a Chair Yoga class as well. I like it for its double duty benefit! it works the adductor and abductor muscles and strengthens the hips in one smooth flowing sequence.



Begin in table position. Engage the abs as you lift one knee out to the side. You can warm up with a few gentle hip circles to loosen the joint before you begin the other hips movements.

Extend the leg out to the side and flex the foot. Hold for strength.



Slowly raise the leg up and down a few times. This is a strengthener for the gluteus minimus and medius muscles. They are our hip stabilizers!

Cross the lifted leg over to the other side of the body and tuck the toes. Turn and look over the shoulder for a gentle twist. Return back to table top and repeat on the other side.

Lahdeedasana

Lahdeedasana was created by Summer Autio, a Yoga teacher at my studio for many years. She passed away from Ovarian cancer in 2010. This pose was her spur of the moment creation after we all had just finished a challenging sequence in her Open Levels class.

“Sit back, kick back! Relax in Lahdeedasana!”

Summer’s Wisdom to all of us lives on!

